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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 14, 2006

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GUILTY PLEAS ENTERED IN SHRIMPER'S "DEATH" HOAX MATTER

Lisa Godbey Wood, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia, announced today that **Kevin Klarell Washington**, age 32, and his wife, **Lavonnia Denise Washington**, age 29, **of Savannah, Georgia**, pleaded guilty on September 14, 2006 in U.S. District Court in Savannah to charges contained in a ten-count indictment related to Kevin Klarell Washington's faked disappearance and death on September 13, 2005. Kevin Washington was reported missing on September 13, 2005 after reportedly falling off the shrimp boat *God's Mercy* in Ossabaw Sound. The United States Coast Guard engaged in intensive search and rescue operations in Ossabaw Sound after Washington's crewmate made an emergency 911 call from a cellular telephone aboard the boat. Washington was arrested in Orlando, Florida on June 20, 2006 following reports indicating that he was still alive.

Appearing before Judge B. Avant Edenfield, Kevin Klarell Washington pleaded guilty to counts three and seven of the indictment. Count three of the indictment charged him with knowingly and intentionally distributing "crack" cocaine on November 3, 2004 in Savannah.

Count seven charged him with making a false distress call to the United States Coast Guard on September 13, 2005.

Lavonna Denise Washington pleaded guilty to making false declarations before the grand jury concerning her husband's death. During her appearance before the federal grand jury on June 8, 2006, Lavonna Denise Washington testified under oath that Kevin Klarell Washington had fallen overboard from the fishing vessel "God's Mercy" and drowned. This testimony of Lavonna Washington was false in that she knew that her husband was alive at the time of her appearance before the grand jury.

Both defendants also agreed pursuant to their plea agreements to forfeit to the government their interests in the fishing vessel "God's Mercy" and a 1998 Lexus used during the commission of the drug offense. Kevin Washington has been in custody since his arrest in Florida on June 20, 2006. Lavonna Washington, who was released on a \$200,000 bond following her arrest on June 21, 2006, was permitted to remain on bond pending sentencing.

The defendants will be sentenced upon the completion of a pre-sentence investigation report. Kevin Washington is facing a term of imprisonment of up to 20 years on the drug charge and a term of up to 6 years for making the false distress call. Lavonna Washington faces imprisonment for up to 5 years.

The investigation was conducted by the Drug Enforcement Administration and the United States Coast Guard Investigative Service. The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Karl Knoche.

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